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By Ron Fett, Staff Photographer

It's Free; This Book Tells Where

BEGINNING with the letter P, there are parades, planetarium shows, perfume tours and pretzel factories. Or take any other letter of the alphabet and you come up with bird shows and butterfly farms, factory and farm tours—even sky diving and slot machines.

All of these varied attractions are admission-free for the vacationing families who wish there were some less expensive way to tour the U.S. and enjoy themselves en route.

These and about 500 others are detailed in a new book, "See America Free," which was the brainchild of an enterprising wife and mother, Mrs. Sabin Robbins.

Sallie Ann Robbins, whose husband writes for the news service of the National Geographic Society (they both belong to the Society of American Travel Writers), became interested in the subject of free attractions after they began traveling with Robbie, age 3, and Billie, 1, and found that every attraction came with small fees attached that added up fast for a young family.

"My husband did a small article on free factory tours and I thought, "What else is free? Why not compile a list?"

THE WORDS proved to be more easily said than done. But Mrs. Robbins wrote letters to Chambers of Commerce and convention bureaus, and a year later her persistence paid off in all kinds of unexpected ways (from space-age farms to free demonstrations on how to raise horses, camellias, bees, stop a flood or brew a fine champagne).

Taking the next step, she wrote and had her own booklet published this spring. Of the 15,000 copies published, she has sold all but a thousand (on sale at Hecht's, Brentanos and Woodward & Lothrop).

Even more exciting to a budding author: a national paperback house is now interested in publishing an expanded version of her original.

"WHY HAS it sold so well? I suppose because all the world loves something free," said the attractive, slender author. "I thought I would never break even on my original investment, but I have even started to make a profit and it's all going into a savings account for the children's education."

She's getting about 30 orders a day, with lots of mailing help from Robbie (stuffing and pasting). Billie and their lively terrier, Ruggles, cheer them on.

Her favorite local attractions are the FBI tour, guided tours of the Mosque and the National Cathedral, the oldest pretzel bakery at Lititz, Pa., and of course, the National Geographic Society's new building.

As soon as this book is launched, Mrs. Robbins has ambitious plans for its sequels.

"I want to write the same book about Canada. And then, wouldn't it be fun to see Europe free?"